DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 286 613 PS 016 806

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TITLE Child Self-Reports and Perceptions of Parent and Teacher Behavior.
PUB DATE Apr 87
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development (Baltimore, MD, April 23-26, 1987).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Education; *Elementary School Students; Fathers; Grade 4; Low Income Groups; Mothers; Negative Attitudes; Rejection (Psychology); *Self Concept; *Significant Others; *Teacher Behavior
IDENTIFIERS Multiple Measures Approach; Positive Attitudes; Sullivan (Harry Stack)

ABSTRACT

A study of children's perceptions of self and of significant adults investigated Sullivan's (1953) concepts of good me/bad me and good mother/bad mother and extended the analysis to children's perceptions of fathers and teachers. Subjects were 10-year-old elementary school students from low-income families who were enrolled in a longitudinal study of children and families. The total sample included data from 10 white boys, 12 white girls, 37 black boys, and 40 black girls. Measures used to collect child self-reports in individual interviews included a Self-Evaluation Inventory, a Self-Report of Conduct Inventory, The Self-Rating Scale for Depression, the Affect Balance Scale, and the Trait Anxiety Inventory for Children. Child perceptions of parent behavior were collected with brief versions of the Child Report of Parent Behavior Inventory, which was revised to develop scales for child reports of teacher acceptance and rejection. Findings suggested that (1) children may have organized perceptions of adults which are internalized as positive and negative self-perceptions; (2) perceptions of parents may be generalized to other adults; and (3) perceptions of self may be externalized as perceptions of others' attitudes toward the self. (RH)

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ED286613

Child Self-Reports and Perceptions of Parent and Teacher Behavior

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Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the
Society for Research in Child Development
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April, 1987

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Research on self-perceptions has been influenced by Mead's (1934: 138) statement that "The individual experiences himself as such not directly, but only indirectly, from the particular standpoints of other individual members of the same social group, or from the generalized standpoint of the social group as a whole to which he belongs." Vygotsky's statement (Quoted in Levitin, 1982: 17) is similar: "We are conscious of ourselves because we are conscious of others, and by the same token as we are conscious of others, because we are to ourselves what others are to us." Cooley's (1912: 152) concept of the "looking glass self" also suggested that perceptions of others attitudes toward the self are related to self-perceptions.

The importance of parents for a child's perception of self was supported by Coopersmith's (1967) finding that the child's self esteem was correlated with parent attitudes. Sullivan (1953) suggested that personifications of the "good mother" and "bad mother" during infancy are related to subsequent personifications of "good me" and "bad me". Rode's (1971) finding that adolescent alienation is highly correlated with perceptions of fathers as well as mothers suggests the need to investigate perceptions of both parents. Bryant's (1974) report that a child's locus of control is correlated with the child's report of difficulties in relationship with teacher suggests that child perceptions of teacher are also correlated with child perceptions of self.

Rosenberg's (1979) review of conceptions of self supported a symbolic interaction theory of self-perceptions and suggested that future research might attempt to refine the theory. A study of child perceptions of self and of significant adults was planned to investigate Sulivans (1953) concepts of

good me and bad me and of good mother and bad mother and to extend the analysis to perceptions of fathers and teachers. A differentiated analysis of child's positive and negative perceptions of mother, father and teacher and of self-perceptions would determine the extent of generalization of perceptions of self and of significant adults. The analysis would also determine relationships among positive and negative perceptions of self and of significant adults.

METHOD:

The sample consists of ten-year-old elementary school children from low-income families who are enrolled in a longitudinal study of children and families. The total sample includes data from 10 white boys, 12 white girls, 37 black boys, and 40 black girls. Sample sizes for different analyses vary because of missing data, for example, father absence resulted in reports of father behavior for 44 subjects.

Individual interviews were conducted with the children at their elementary school during the fourth grade, or at a lower grade if previously retained. Methods used to collect child self-reports included a Self-Evaluation Inventory with separate scales for positive and negative self-evaluation, a Self-Report of Conduct Inventory with scales for altruistic and antisocial behavior, The Self-Rating Scale for Depression (Birelson, 1981) which was scored separately for negative and positive items, the Affect Balance Scale which was scored for positive and negative affect (Bradburn, 1969) and the Trait Anxiety Inventory for Children (Spielberger, 1970). Child perceptions of parent behavior were collected with brief versions of the Child Report of Parent Behavior Inventory (Schaefer, 1965) that included items for parental acceptance and rejection. The parent method was revised to develop scales for child reports of teacher acceptance and rejection.

Factor analyses and scale analyses yielded similar measures of acceptance and rejection for mother, father, and teacher. Cronbach's alphas were computed to determine reliability of the child's perceptions of self and adults. Intercorrelations among the perceptions of adults and among the self-reports were computed as well as correlations between perceptions of adults and self. Backward multiple correlations were computed of each of the scales of perceptions of adults with the combined self-report scales and of each of the self-reports scales with the combined perception of adult scales. Finally, canonical correlations were computed between perceptions of adults and self reports, first for the larger sample with complete data for perceptions of mother and teacher, and second for the smaller sample with complete data on perceptions of mother, father and teacher.

RESULTS:

The internal consistency reliabilities that are reported in Table 1 are similar for reports of teacher, mother, and father and for reports of acceptance and rejection with a range of .69 to .79. Highly significant correlations were found between reports of mother and teacher for acceptance and for rejection but insignificant correlations between perceptions of teacher and father. The significant correlations between mother and father perceptions are lower than have been found in samples of older children (Schaefer, 1965). Correlations between perceptions of acceptance and rejection are low and often insignificant supporting independent analyses of positive and negative perceptions of significant adults.

(Table 1 here)

The internal consistency reliabilities of the self-report scales that are reported in Table 2 vary from .35 and .38 for the brief Affect Balance Scales to .62 for longer self-report scales. The low reliabilities contribute to the

relatively low intercorrelations among the positive self-report scales that vary from .13 to .33 and among the negative self-report scales that vary from .16 to .38. Correlations between the negative self-report and positive self-report scales are lower with the highest negative correlation of -.33 between reports of altruistic and antisocial behavior. The child's self-perceptions are not highly reliable nor highly intercorrelated, and negative and positive self-reports have low, often insignificant, correlations with one another.

(Table 2 here)

The correlations of the child's self-report scales with reports of adults' acceptance and rejection are reported in Table 3. Both teacher and mother acceptance, that are significantly correlated with one another, are significantly and similarly correlated with child self-reports, particularly self-reports of positive affect from the Depression scale (rs = .55 and .49) and Affect Balance Scale (rs = .28 and .21) and with self-report of altruism. In contrast, father acceptance has low and insignificant correlations with the child self-report scales. Father rejection has significant correlations with self-report of antisocial behavior and with measures of negative and positive affect. Mother and teacher rejection also have significant correlations with positive and negative affect scales. Several of the correlations between child reports of mother, father and teacher behavior and child self-reports are higher than correlations among child self-report scales, suggesting that perceptions of significant adults are substantially correlated with self-perceptions.

(Table 3 here)

In order to clarify the relationship of child self-reports to the child's perceptions of adults a series of backward eliminating regression analyses were conducted. In six separate analyses perceptions of the acceptance and

rejection of mother, teacher, and father were predicted from child's self-report scales. The results further support that the perception of father as rejecting is most highly related to the child's negative self-reports. The self-report of positive affect with a negative weight in the model, presence of depressive symptoms, and the presence of antisocial behavior predicted a substantial proportion of the variance of the reports of father's rejection (R^2 = .41, $p < .0001$). The regression analyses revealed very similar models for the prediction of mother and teacher acceptance. Mother acceptance was significantly predicted by the self-report of altruism and positive affect (R^2 = .29, $p < .0001$) while altruism, positive affect, and negative self-evaluation with a negative weight significantly predicted teacher acceptance (R^2 = .38, $p < .0001$). The regression models concerning father acceptance and mother and teacher rejection each resulted in $R^2 < .20$; consequently they are not interpreted.

The first canonical correlation of the set of reports of mother and teacher behavior scales with the set of self-report scales was significant (R = .75, Adjusted R = .71, $p < .0001$). The highest correlations of the canonical variates were with mother and teacher acceptance and with positive affect and altruistic behavior, with lower correlations for mother and teacher rejection and child negative self-reports. Because of reduced sample size, the first canonical correlation of mother, father and teacher behavior scales with the set of self-report scales was less significant although higher (R = .85, adjusted R = .72, $p < .02$). With the inclusion of father scales the highest correlations with the canonical variates were for father rejection and for negative self-reports, including negative affect and the antisocial scale. The canonical correlations that integrate the entire set of perceptions of significant adults and of self-reports support the analyses of the individual

scales in revealing significant correlations between perceptions of adults and of self.

DISCUSSION:

The relatively low correlations between perceptions of acceptance and of rejection by significant adults support Sullivan's distinction between good mother and bad mother. Apparently the child's perceptions of accepting behaviors and rejecting behaviors of mother, father and teacher are not integrated into bipolar dimensions of acceptance versus rejection. Separate scales are needed to investigate the child's perceptions of acceptance and of rejection by significant adults.

The significant correlations between reports of mother and father shows generalization in child's perceptions of parents that is supported by other research (Schaefer, 1965). However, the significant correlations between mother and teacher perceptions but insignificant correlations between father and teacher perceptions suggests that generalization may be specific to certain roles. Perhaps the correlations between mother and teacher indicate generalizations of perceptions of women who have primary responsibility in their own setting of home and school.

The relatively low reliabilities and low intercorrelations among child self-report scales suggest that the child's perceptions of self may be less integrated than the child's perceptions of significant adults. The low correlations among self-report scales also suggest that positive and negative perceptions of self are relatively independent. Reports of good me and bad me and of positive and negative affect apparently coexist rather than being integrated into a bipolar dimension.

Differentiation of perceptions of different adults, of acceptance and rejection, and of positive and negative self-reports is supported by the

pattern of correlations between reports of significant adults and self-reports. Mother and teacher acceptance that have significant correlation with one another are significantly correlated with positive self-reports while father acceptance has low correlations with child self-reports. Perhaps perceptions of mother's acceptance are generalized to teacher acceptance, or positive perceptions of self are externalized as perceptions of teacher acceptance of self. Father rejection shows highest correlations with the child's negative self-reports although mother and teacher rejection are also correlated with negative affect. Father rejection is the only significant correlate of the child's self-report of antisocial behavior, a finding that is similar to an integration of research on parental correlates of conduct disorders (Hetherington & Martin, 1979). The finding that father rejection is more related to negative self-evaluation while mother and teacher acceptance are more related to positive self-evaluation suggests that fathers and mothers play different roles in the lives of children for this low-income sample.

The major findings reveal the need for a differentiated analysis of perceptions of acceptance and rejection of mothers, fathers, and teachers that might be extended to analysis of perceptions of peer acceptance and rejection. The findings suggest that children may have organized perceptions of adults that are internalized as positive and negative self-perceptions. Perceptions of parents may also be generalized to other adults, e.g., in this study from perceptions of mothers to teachers. Perceptions of self may be externalized as perceptions of others' attitudes toward the self, i.e., perceptions of good me and bad me may influence perceptions of teacher acceptance and rejection. Murray's (1938) suggestion that alpha press, or the objective situation, is less related to adjustment than beta press, or the subjective perception of the situation, may explain why child's perceptions of acceptance and rejection

by significant others are significantly correlated with self-reports of adjustment. Perhaps both generalization of perceptions of parents to perceptions of other adults and externalization of perceptions of self through perceptions of attitudes of others toward self contribute to stability of self-perceptions.

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TABLE 1

Internal Consistency Reliabilities and
Intercorrelations of Reports of Parents and Teacher

		1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Teacher Acceptance	(74)[1]					
2	Mother Acceptance	54**	(69)				
3	Father Acceptance	03	34*	(75)			
4	Teacher Rejection	-08	-16	03	(70)		
5	Mother Rejection	-20	-12	-15	54**	(79)	
6	Father Rejection	-30	-31*	-25	20	46**	(70)

[1] Decimal points omitted
* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

TABLE 2

Internal Consistency Reliabilities and Intercorrelations of Self-Reports of Adjustment

	SEI+	ALT	CDD+	ABS+	ANX	CDD-	SEI-	ABS-	ANTIS
Self-Evaluation Positive	(62)[1]								
Self Report of Conductu Altruism	29**	(52)							
Depression Scale Positive Affect	13	24*	(62)						
Affect Balance Scale Positive Affect	18	16	33**	(38)					
Anxiety Scale	05	08	-02	11	(61)				
Depression Scale Negative Affect	-09	-24*	-23*	-16	38**	(60)			
Self-Evaluation Negative	-10	-08	-17	-20*	21*	22*	(55)		
Affect Balance Scale Negative Affect	-03	-02	-19	-17	18	35**	30**	(35)	
Self-Report of Conduct Antisocial	-10	-33**	-12	04	16	26**	25*	30**	(60)

[1] Decimal points omitted

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

TABLE 3

Correlations of Self-Reports with Reports of Parents and Teachers

	Acceptance			Rejection		
Positive Self-Reports	Teacher	Mother	Father	Teacher	Mother	Father
Self-Evaluation Positive	17[1]	22	07	-12	-20	-01
Self Report of Conduct Altruism	38**	34**	11	-08	-30**	-13
Depression Scale Positive Affect	55**	49**	07	-21*	-22*	-38*
Affect Balance Scale Positive Affect	28**	21*	26	-14	-22	-39**
Negative Self-Reports						
Anxiety Scale	-04	-03	07	15	16	37*
Depression Scale Negative Affect	-23*	-18	05	32**	40**	57**
Self-Evaluation Negative	-24*	-24*	-11	05	13	18
Affect Balance Scale Negative Affect	-11	-12	01	37**	18	28
Self-Report of Conduct Antisocial	-16	-20	04	14	11	42**

[1] Decimal points omitted

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$